

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

The people of Lincoln and Lancaster County have built a distinguished urban and rural environment over the community's history, highlighted by one of America's greatest buildings, the Nebraska State Capitol.

This environment combines the rolling rural countryside, accented by town and villages with their distinctive church spires, water towers, and grain elevators, and the urban setting of Lincoln, with its excellent community architecture, attractive boulevards, mature landscapes, and superb neighborhoods. At the center of the City and the County, visible near and far, is the Capitol tower, creating a unique and identifiable place.

This section views the community's historical origins and development, on-going historic preservation efforts, and current urban design features and cultural resources.

COMMUNITY ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

The first known settlers of this prairie, ancestors of the Pawnee and Otoe peoples, built an earthlodge village on Salt Creek south of present-day Lincoln over 1,000 years ago. The archeological remains of the village, listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the "Schrader Site," remind us that our community's roots run deep in the past and that many of our historic resources are not immediately apparent.

In 1867, the original designers of Lincoln laid out upon the prairie a grid of wide streets, square blocks, and regular alleys, from "A" Street on the south to "U" Street on the north, and from 1st Street on the west to 17th Street on the east. The gently rolling terrain accommodated this grid easily, creating a foundation for a city which was readily comprehensible and expandable. The Original Plat of 1867 provided business sites near the center of the city, reserved large blocks for the Capitol, state university, and a park, and provided land for a county courthouse, school sites, a market place and other necessities throughout the plan.



A strength of Lincoln's first plan was how readily it could be expanded by adding to the grid on the south, the east, and the north. Even the suburban towns founded east of the city in the 1880's and 1890s aligned their grids with Lincoln's, facilitating their integration into the city in the 1920's. A weakness of the plan was its close proximity to Salt Creek, which regularly flooded the western third of the Original Plat for nearly a century and impeded growth to the west and the north.

Much of the Original Plat remains evident, giving form to the city through such major features as the Capitol location, the core of the UNL City campus, the County-City Building location, three Lincoln Public Schools sites, and Cooper Park. The setting of the Capitol is enhanced by Centennial and Lincoln Malls and the landscaping of South 15th Street, all of which utilized the extra-wide right-of-ways assigned to those and other key streets in 1867.



Throughout Haymarket Landmark District, the loading docks, Farmers Market, and sidewalk cafes show the multitude of special uses possible within the “ordinary” 100 foot right-of-ways.

For its first fifty years, most expansion beyond the Original Plat faithfully followed the grid, as Lincoln grew from a town with a few dozen residents in 1867, to a city of about 55,000 by 1920.

Sheridan Place of 1909 marked the first significant deviation from the grid, followed by Woodscrest and Sheridan Park in 1916. Few major additions used a simple grid after

that time. The best of these new residential areas, including Woodshire, Sheridan Boulevard, and its environs, add variety to the city, make fuller use of existing terrain, and provide ample, comprehensible connections back to the wider grid. These are the neighborhoods that “New Urbanism” or “neo-traditional planning” seeks to emulate in new development.

A unique historic and cultural asset of Lincoln and Lancaster County, and a special resource for providing orientation and connections throughout the city and the county, is our remarkable State Capitol. The 400-foot tower was planned and executed as **the** key historic, architectural, and geographic landmark of the city and surrounding countryside.

From distant vistas along Highway 77 and Interstate 80 to intimate glimpses from the Near South neighborhood, views of the Capitol identify the city and unify the whole area. Many of the best elements of Lincoln's built environment are based on or enriched by Capitol views—Holmes Lake and Woods Parks, the Capitol Malls, the tree-lined vistas from Pioneers Park, and the homeowners' park at Woodshire.

On the framework of the original grid and dominated by the Capitol tower, the Lincoln and Lancaster County community has built a highly liveable environment with abundant parks and trails, proud but welcoming neighborhoods, well-designed and well-used community facilities including public and parochial schools, libraries, churches, colleges and the University with park-like campuses. Students, residents, and visitors make good use of the community's high-quality, specialized museums, and the campuses, parks, and streetscapes are enlivened by public art.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The community's interest in preserving and enhancing its historic and cultural resources was codified in 1979 and 1980 by amendments to the County and City zoning codes. The City inaugurated a systematic preservation program, creating a Historic Preservation Commission and Historic Preservation District within the zoning code, and adding a preservation planner to the Planning Department staff.

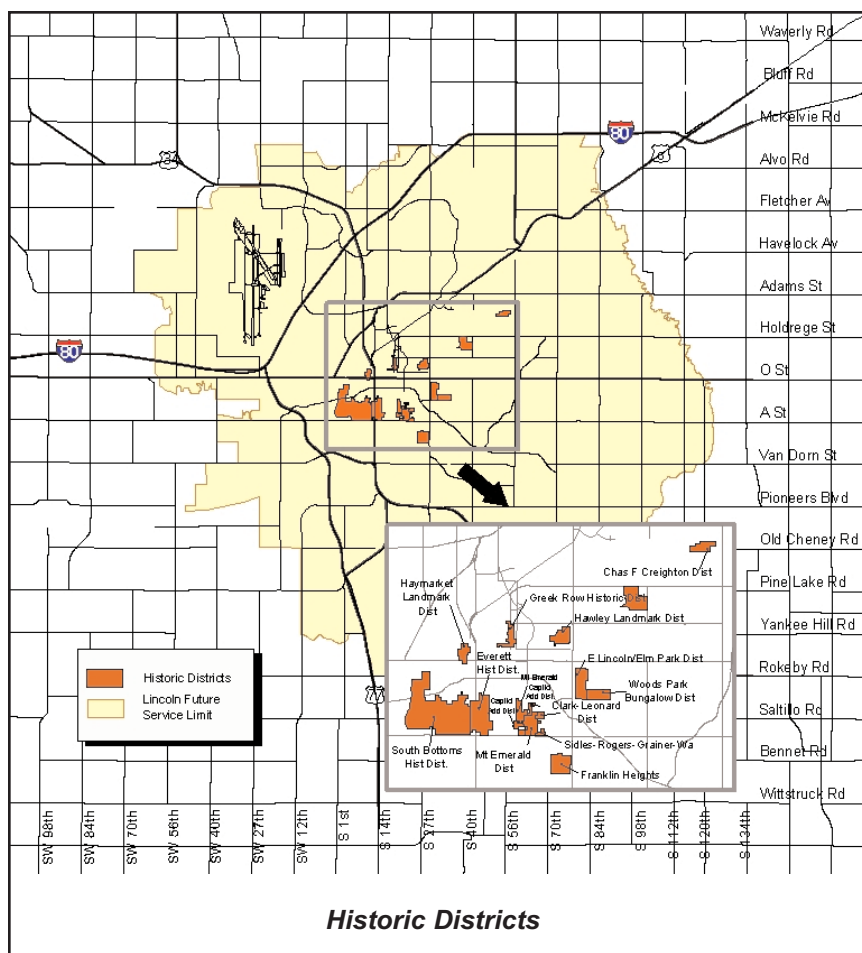


The City program has always worked closely with state and federal historic preservation efforts through the Preservation Office of the Nebraska State Historical Society. This relationship was formalized in 1985 when the city was designated a "Certified Local Government" for purposes of historic preservation, giving it official standing within the national preservation process. In 1988 the City and the State jointly created a Nebraska Capitol Environs

Commission to advocate for improvement of the area around the Capitol. By 1994, the Commission was vested with authority to review public and private improvement projects near the Capitol and its Malls.

Activities of the Lincoln preservation program include survey and research on sites and areas within the county, identification of potential landmarks and districts, and designations of historic properties through Lincoln Landmark and National Register of Historic Place programs.

Over 100 separate buildings, districts, and places have been designated under either or both programs, ranging from the 500 acres of Pioneers Park to CB&Q RR locomotive 710, and from the mansion of Frank Woods, founder of Lincoln Telephone & Telegraph Company, to the cottage of Anna and Rev. Oliver Burckhardt, an artist and her minister husband who were leading members of Lincoln's early African American community.



Survey, research, and designation can begin the process of preserving a community's heritage, but they cannot complete the tasks of utilizing and maintaining historic buildings and areas. Government can provide leadership by its stewardship and continued use of its own landmarks, such as Old City Hall or many of the community's public schools, or by offering surplus properties for rehabilitation by private interests, as occurred with Hayward School and the A Street Waterworks.

The city also offers limited assistance through regulatory or financial incentives, such as special permits for innovative uses of landmarks, or facade improvement loans. In districts such as Haymarket and downtown, the city uses its redevelopment powers to augment and help coordinate private efforts.

But most preservation work must be carried out by individual property owners, and this plan recognizes the central role of private property owners. Advocacy for and interest in historic preservation also draws strength from non-governmental organizations, especially neighborhood associations and the Preservation Association of Lincoln.

The Lincoln preservation program has been especially active in the area of outreach through publications, walking tours, and public presentations. The activities of historic preservation and local history research can create bridges between people of different generations, ethnicities, neighborhoods, and backgrounds, when respect for and interest in the past becomes a community-building activity.

URBAN DESIGN AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The protection and enhancement of the community's historic and cultural resources is also furthered by the Urban Design Committee, which began as an advisory body to the Mayor by executive order in the 1970's, then was formalized as an advisor to all city departments and agencies by ordinance in 1981. The Committee advises city government on how city policies or projects impact the aesthetics and livability of the city—in other words, on matters of urban design. The Committee is also asked to review design aspects of public/private projects, such as redevelopment projects downtown.



The Lincoln Arts Council, a non-governmental advocacy group, plays a lead role in promoting the arts and especially public art projects in Lincoln. Among the museums that enrich the community are UNL's Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, State Museum at Morrill Hall, the Chistlieb Gallery of the Great Plains Art Collection and Lentz Gallery of Asian Art.



The Nebraska State Historical Society offers the Museum of Nebraska History and Kennard House, along with its research library and archives, which are well-used by visitors and residents alike. The Lincoln Children's Museum has grown into a dynamic new facility as a private/public partnership, and the Folsom Children's Zoo and Botanical Garden is another partnership which operates a thriving and non-governmental facility on city park land.

Lincoln and Lancaster County are more livable, friendly, distinctive, and economically vibrant due to the contributions of these and other public and private cultural facilities.